



FAB FIFTIES

Words: Jill Whitfield Photos: Cory Varcoe Photography www.coryvarcoe.co.nz

Southern scooter riders well on the road to Queenstown from Bluff, on September 3, and raising over \$45,000 for the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

Group rides are a common sight in NZ, but 75 small capacity scooters riding from Bluff to Queenstown is something completely different...

The Great Southern Scooter Challenge was for a serious cause, but was a 'fun' day, with a brilliant end result.

Seventy-five hardy souls on an ancient and modern motley assortment of 50cc scooters braved the elements on a journey from Bluff to Queenstown on September 3, to raise funds for the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

Not a problem, we thought, it was only 222km, not raining too much, the temperature not too severe – for mostly hardy Southland souls – and most scooters (maybe) averaged around 50-55kph tops.

An 8.30am start, in rainy conditions that improved to sun, set the tone for the day – all being unused to somewhat hair-raising Le Mans-type starts! The only challenging part on the first leg was probably the unexpected sideways-battering winds from the estuary at Woodend. Well, we just seriously leant in to it.

From then on the weather progressively improved, while 'hazards' of a different kind evolved. It was most disconcerting to be overtaken by a giant pink fluffy bunny rabbit on a scooter, long ears billowing in the wind. And up ahead was a glimpse of a giant bumblebee, wings flapping madly and a menacing red sting in the end of his tail.

Two enormous Heineken beer bottles showed a streak of inventiveness, with necks and bottle tops bent backwards whilst riding, but upstanding when stopped.

Mr Bumblebee was even more organised, with a pump in his (costume's) bottom, inflating it to even more

Brent Henderson: "If I lean forward all the way will it go faster, or just give me a sore butt?"



"Furry Grandmother" Jill Whitfield, article contributor, challenge participant and "best dressed female" (!) was stunned by the generous donations made and impressed by the organisation of the event.

Photo: Julie Crofts



'Booting' the step-through along with a step from behind. And what's with the gas mask? Countering a good Southland silage smell?



Eye-catching bumble bee Hayden Rankin buzzed along, with a blow-up bottom and a sting in his tail!

scary proportions when stationary. He was quite a sight spotted leaning over a traffic police car in Lumsden.

The day was impressively organised and managed by a committee led by Alister Rance with Brent Richardson, Hamish Gutsell, Tash Clay, Shelley Stevens, Mark Hopwood and Michael White, all of Invercargill, and well-resourced through Placemakers Invercargill.

Pilot and tail-end vehicles were fully-equipped for emergencies of any or all types, and supplied by Southroads. You name it and they were reassurance for all riders, who also had their own support crews.

Eight stops throughout the day kept the group together and safe riding practices ensured the overtaking public was not held up. In fact smiles and waves were many. Smaller communities lined the roadside in several places. Garston schoolchildren fronted their primary school to greet us.

Road signs indicating we should slow to 80kph provided humorous "if only..." moments - as we sped along mostly flat-out at 55. Those of you who 'automatically' slowed when you saw a police car.....silly!

And – sorry mate, but I have to mention this – whilst gathered at the roadside at Garston in a large group of 75 x 50cc scooters plus support vehicles and personnel, a large Harley travelling in the other direction roared up opposite us, pulled into the gravel... and the poor man dropped his bike!

He didn't break too much off his machine, and you will note that not one of us laughed. As they say, there but for the grace of God.....

Organising committee members, Placemakers' Alister Rance (R) and Hamish Gutsell in their Heineken bottles were sure they were "lukinbetta".



Bunny hops were never like this in Beatrix Potter. Chris Lange urges-on his "best-dressed scooter".

Some were not so kind to Shelley whilst offering advice and instruction at each stop. She did a great job especially considering at times it must have been like trying to control a bunch of naughty children. Honestly, all that mischievous horn tooting, guys! Watch out, she'll get her own back.

And what about the naughty bumblebee who furtively switched off one rider's ignition just at the point of the Le Mans-style start? And the certain Placemakers' manager who hoon-like drove the contents of a puddle into surrounding riders at the Devil's Staircase start-off?

Competitiveness was not the theme of the day – although there are always some - it was a totally friendly bunch, having a thoroughly enjoyable day.

What an amazing mix of the macho-men, superheroes, penguins, cuddly and whimsical, beer-themed, be-wigged, gaudy bright - and normally-dressed, scooter riders.

The organisation was superb and funds counted on the day topped \$45,000, with the final total eventually rising to \$50,384.19. What a great effort, and a big thank you to those who donated money.

John McHugh of Winton's Middle Pub supplied a scrumptious morning tea at a minimal charge then donated a large sum to the charity; and a delicious barbecue lunch at Lumsden supplied by Placemakers was much appreciated by all.

Queenstown appeared to buzz with excitement at our arrival, and after what was the worst hillclimb struggle up Fernhill, some to almost standstill and a few even pushing, all involved enjoyed refreshments at the Mercure Hotel, with prize rewards for a lucky few.

An ironic 'reward' was given to Evel Knievel, whose scooter didn't make the distance; the 'most donations collected' went to Ross Richardson, who donated his prize back for auction; 'best dressed' was Vital Signs' Mike White aka an American police officer; and best team effort went to Placemakers Wanaka, promoting the prostate cancer fund.

As for myself, decked out as a 'Furry Grandmother', morphed from a Fairy Godmother (too fat with nine layers of clothes topped with a tutu, and being told my helmet was more grossly furry than fairy!), as a first-time rider in this event, would I do it again?

Absolutely!